The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World by Rupert Smith. Knopf, 2007, 448 pp., $30.00.

Since its publication in Britain in 2005, Gen Sir Rupert Smith's *The Utility of Force* has garnered effusive praise from a large and eclectic group of commentators, ranging from Sir John Keegan to the *Daily Show's* Jon Stewart. Even some academic reviewers, normally more stingy in their dispersal of accolades, have likened the British general to Carl von Clausewitz. Such acclaim should be taken with a grain of salt. Compared to the dense and timeless insights of *On War,* Smith's book comes across as a more meandering and prescriptive analysis of a particular moment in the history of warfare. Nonetheless, it contains some incisive and provocative analysis of contemporary conflict and serves as an example of how to think rigorously about military strategy and its relationship to politics.

Smith's insights are based on a broad range of recent military experience. He led a British division in the Gulf War of 1991 and served as commander of the United Nations Protection Force in Bosnia in 1995. From 1996 to 1998 he served as General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland, and from 1998 to 2001 he was NATO deputy supreme allied commander Europe. Based on these experiences, he observes in the introduction that armed forces today are frequently asked to perform roles much different from those for which they have traditionally prepared. As a result, they have often struggled to achieve the objectives desired by their political leaders. To use Smith's terminology, the force they have applied has had little utility. The book is an attempt to explain why.

Smith develops his argument in a Clausewitzian manner. Part one of the book chronicles the development of what he calls the paradigm of interstate industrial war. Initiated by Napoléon and refined by American and German politicians and generals during the nineteenth century, this form of warfare culminated in 1945. In part two, Smith focuses on "people's wars," which he identifies as the antithesis to interstate industrial war. He traces their history from the Spanish uprising of 1808 through the partisan campaigns of the Second World War. Smith then identifies a synthesis in a new paradigm of conflict that he calls *war amongst the people*. Although it first emerged after 1945, this paradigm became fully evident following the end of the Cold War.

War amongst the people is characterized by six interconnected trends. First, the objectives of conflicts have become less absolute, with armies fighting to achieve general conditions rather than specific and tangible ends like the destruction of the enemy force and the overthrow of the opposing state. Second, armed forces conduct operations literally in the midst of civilian society and figuratively in front of it, via the global media. Third, given the often intangible objectives for which they are fought, conflicts tend to be timeless. Fourth, Western armies increasingly fight in ways that minimize losses to their own forces. Fifth, armies are required to put old weapons to new uses. Finally, the actors in conflicts are often nonstate entities such as terrorist groups or multinational coalitions. Overall, war amongst the people is characterized by the continual intermingling of military and political

activities. It also sees ongoing fluctuation between political confrontation and outright conflict.

According to Smith, the limited effectiveness of Western militaries since 1991 reflects their continued focus on interstate industrial war despite the emergence of a new paradigm of conflict. Part three of the book explains this problem and offers recommendations based in part on Smith's own experiences in Bosnia. Smith emphasizes the importance of managing multinational forces carefully and maintaining effective relations with both the media and the civilian population amongst which military forces operate. He notes that in war amongst the people, intelligence regarding enemy intentions is at least as important as information regarding enemy capabilities. Above all, he argues that the use of military force will not be effective unless it is combined with political, diplomatic, and other tools and situated within an overarching strategy to achieve a clearly defined objective. In his words, "The strategic object cannot now be achieved through the singular use of massive military force alone; in most cases military force can only achieve tactical results, and to have more than passing value these must be stitched into a greater plan" (p. 378).

Smith could have made his case more succinctly. His detailed explanations of interstate industrial war and people's war are not new, and they reveal an uncertain grasp of military history and theory. For example, Smith's discussion of the First World War focuses almost entirely on Britain and Germany and ignores a wealth of recent scholarship on British tactical innovation. In discussing Vietnam, Smith implies that it was John F. Kennedy, rather than Dwight Eisenhower, who first dispatched military advisors to support the Diem regime. In addition, despite the influence of Clausewitz on *The Utility of Force*, Smith is not particularly careful in his definition and application of Prussian ideas. He reduces the "remarkable trinity" of violence and hatred, the play of chance, and rational calculation to the simpler but less accurate "people, army, and state." Smith then applies this stripped-down version of the trinity in ways that would likely have bewildered Clausewitz himself. In discussing German unification, for example, he argues that the army "was the dominant element. It used the people to create the state, since conscription was as much a tool for nation building as a way for manning the army" (p. 92). These shortcomings do not undermine Smith's central thesis significantly, but neither do they lend credibility to it. Moreover, they may mislead readers unversed in the history of modern war.

A shorter book focusing specifically on contemporary conflict would likely have delivered Smith's argument with greater force. Nonetheless, in its present form the book is replete with insights into the problems facing Western militaries today. Smith's concept of war amongst the people serves as a powerful lens through which to view the current American predicament in Iraq. Some scholars might argue that military force retains more strategic potency than Smith allows. Few, however, would contest his assertion that it must be coordinated more effectively with other tools of power in order to prevail in the conflicts of the twenty-first century.

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